ENGLISH 366: Utopia & Nineteenth-Century America

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Amanda Louise Johnson
CLASS TIME: Tuesday and Thursday, 4 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.
CLASS LOCATION:
OFFICE HOURS: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
OFFICE LOCATION: Herring Hall Room 241

Ευτοπία = Eu – topia = GOOD PLACE

Ουτοπία = U - topia = NO PLACE

Eutopia, in Greek, means "good place," but its homophone, *utopia* means "no place." This pun ironizes any serious belief in the possibility of a perfect human society, and this class will explore how American literature throughout the nineteenth century wrestles with both America as a "good place" that might not actually exist. This conception of America starts early on, with European explorers setting out to find Eden and El Dorado somewhere in the New World, and religious settlers celebrating their newfound colony as a future Zion. Utopianism, then, could be millennial, and even in the 1800s, American authors find themselves struggling with this apocalyptic vision. When practiced in earnest, utopianism had complex material consequences for people and the environment, as utopian thinking drove progressive social movements, but also underwrote colonialist projects such as slavery and westward Manifest Destiny. Serious debates over what constituted the ideal society also structured moments of national founding, or re-founding, as one might consider the era of Reconstruction. Perhaps as a result, literary representations of utopia are often satirical, and provide commentary on contemporary social ills. Utopias, then, often contain within themselves a "bad place" or dystopia that ultimately disrupts the social fantasy. In addition to reading texts that allude to historical examples of American utopianism, this class will also explore how the concept of utopia, a category that announces its own non-existence, can help us understand the philosophical nature of fiction as a type of narrative that is simultaneously "real" and counterfactual.

COURSE POLICIES:

Participation:
Class participation covers a range of related areas: regular attendance, promptness, completion of the day's reading, and frequent participation in the day's discussion. To this end, I ask that you arrive on time for class and participate in the discussion to the best of your ability. (As a rule of thumb, try to engage in conversation a minimum of once per class.) You may bring in laptops, tablets, kindles, and the like to read texts directly from the internet; however, **the device you bring must be larger than a cellphone, so that I may see the screen and see that you are on-task.** In any event, cellphones should be turned off during class. You are not permitted to record class proceedings with your electronic devices, unless you have a note from the disabilities office requiring such accommodation. You can, of course, also bring in paper copies of the required readings. You must also bring paper and writing utensils, such as pens or pencils, for in-class writing activities.

Attendance:
As a discussion-oriented course, the effectiveness of this class is dependent upon your regular attendance at class meetings, both for the benefit of the class as a whole and for your own personal development. I will allow you **TWO** unexcused absences over the course of the term – no questions asked. Whether you are sick or going to Disneyland does not matter to me; in fact, **I only need to see doctors' notes *after* you have used up your two free absences.** If you miss more than two classes, I will lower your overall grade by a half grade (e.g. from an A to an A-) for every additional unexcused absence.

Paper Assignments:
You will write two formal papers and two comprehensive rewrites over the course of the semester, the first paper being 4-6 pages long. Exactly how long depends upon your argument. These papers need to be written in Times New Roman, with a 12-point font size, and be double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides, and aligned to the left. You may consult EasyBib.com and use the MLA style to format your paper. You are expected to observe the rules of mechanics and grammatical usage, and you are expected to make sure that you catch any mistakes that your computer finds. **For instance, Spellcheck recognizes both "from" and "form" as words, but "fomr" is not a word.** "Fomr" should not appear anywhere in writing assignments that you turn into me. Of course, you should also read your papers over by yourself and make sure you are not using "form" in place of "from," and vice versa.

Papers will be due in my email inbox (amanda.l.johnson@rice.edu) by 11:59 p.m. of the due date. You have an opportunity for one free 24-hour extension for the semester, I'd hold onto it as long as possible to give breathing room. Late papers will be marked down by a half-letter grade for each day it is overdue. For instance, an otherwise-A paper that is one day overdue will earn an A-. An otherwise-A paper that is three days overdue will earn a B. Also important: as this is not a high school class, you are responsible for keeping track of your own grades and assignments. **If you extremely late or completely neglect to turn in a paper, you will be notified of such when the grades for the assignment are dispensed.**

According to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), I am not supposed to email you your grades. I will do so, however, if you email me permission.

Mandatory Rewrites:
You will also rewrite your two papers, in order to understand more fully the cognitive work involved in the revision process. You will notice that the rewrites are worth slightly more than your original papers. That is because your rewrite is required to be a **complete rewriting, or writing-over**, of your original paper. It is much more than a proofread or a revision. A rewrite must show a thorough reworking of the substance of your argument, the presentation and interpretation of evidence, and a refinement of rhetorical style. Every portion of the original essay—the introduction, the body, the conclusion—must be substantially different in the rewrite. In essence, when you rewrite the essay, you **write it again.**

Writing Help:
We will be doing a series of in-class writing activities to help us think about, and perhaps improve, our writing process and skills of expression. Another useful tool outside of class is the Center for Writing, Oral, and Visual Communication, which is located on the second-floor Mezzanine of the Fondren Library.

Difficult Subject Matter:
Throughout the semester, our discussions will address a range topics relating to the amazing and also sometimes unpleasant variety of human experience. We will recognize the seriousness of this material, but we will also address it bravely by discussing it directly. I also encourage you to come to office hours and speak to me directly about any concerns you might have, whether about the reading, or the way in which the reading is discussed. It is also inevitable, furthermore, that in the midst of class discussion, I or someone else in the room expresses an opinion that is strongly opposed to the opinion of someone else in the room. You might strongly object to what someone else is saying. When this happens, please refrain from accusing that person of anything, or calling that person names—instead, ask clarifying questions, to see if you both disagree as strongly as you think you do, and if you do still disagree, explain what assumptions the other person is making, what evidence that person has overlooked, and so forth. The point in discussion is for us to learn from each other.

Difficult Language:
Discussing literature means discussing language, and when discussing language, no word is off-limits, no matter how profane. That said, it is not appropriate to use a slur as an identifier for living or dead persons in or outside of the classroom. This logic applies to hate speech concerning race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religious identity or nationality. Otherwise, anything goes.

Grading:
A—Excellent – 100 of 100
Provocative thesis statement
Analysis goes far beyond class discussion,
Smooth and purposeful transitions

A- = 96 of 100
B+ = 92 of 100

B—Good, but uninspired – 88 of 100
Clear thesis, but not sophisticated or interesting
Good use of textual evidence
Very few mechanical errors

B- = 84 of 100
C+ = 80 of 100

C—Average – 76 of 100
Meets minimum level of assignment, BUT
Hazy or banal thesis statement OR Good thesis statement, but undeveloped
Poor organization or structure, poor or non-existent transitions
Lacks complex sentence structure, poor mechanics

If it looks like an assignment will earn anything less than a C (and it was turned in on time), we will discuss what to do about your assignment.

PLEASE NOTE: If you turn in nothing at all, you get a ZERO for the assignment. If you turn in something and get an F, you get a 56. THAT IS SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER THAN A ZERO. ALWAYS TURN STUFF IN.

Extra Credit:
Throughout the semester, visiting scholars and creative writers will present their work on campus. I will forward any notices of such events. If you attend such an event and provide a two-page response, you will earn extra credit to your grade. The amount of extra credit is awarded at the instructor's discretion.

Plagiarism:
Plagiarism is the presentation of phrasing or ideas lifted directly from another source, without acknowledgment of that source. Plagiarism cases are handed over to the Honor Council and may result in an automatic F for the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the University. Instructors have access to the same materials, Internet and otherwise, as students do; please keep this in mind when writing your papers. Always acknowledge your sources for work that is not your own. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism and what constitutes it, please see or talk to me **BEFORE** handing in your paper. Any instance of plagiarism, accidental or otherwise, will be treated as such as soon as I have received the paper.

Other Expectations of Conduct:
You do not have to raise your hand to go to the bathroom; simply excuse yourself and come back. You can eat during class time, as long as you clean up after yourself. If you are caught sleeping, you will be counted as absent for the day. Finally, let me reiterate: **cellphones are to be off during class, and gratuitous use of social media during class time will also result in being marked as absent.**

REQUIRED READINGS:

These texts must be brought to class in hardcopy form:

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*	ISBN 978-0140390285
Lydia Maria Childe, *A Romance of the Republic*	ISBN 978-0813109282
Sutton E. Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio*	ISBN 978-0812971606
Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*	ISBN 978-0199552573

These texts will be available on Blackboard:
Thomas More, *Utopia*
Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*
John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity"
Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*
Phillis Wheatley, selected poems
Alexandre de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*
John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*
Nina Baym, "Concepts of Romance in Hawthorne's America"
William Gilmore Simms, Preface to *The Yemassee*
Herman Melville, "Paradise of Bachelors"
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
David Walker, *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*

READING SCHEDULE:

UNIT ONE: INTRODUCTION

Tuesday, August 25: Introduction to course – definitions of "Utopia" – A look at BJU Press; discuss Plato

Thursday, August 27: More, Behn, Winthrop excerpts

UNIT TWO: REPUBLICAN VISIONS OF AMERICA

Tuesday, September 1: Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* excerpts, Wheatley Poems

Thursday, September 3: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (excerpts)

UNIT THREE: AMERICA: GARDEN OF EDEN

Sunday, September 6: Response #1 due

Tuesday, September 8: *Walden* (excerpts)

Thursday, September 10: *Letters from An American Farmer* (excerpts)

Saturday, September 12: Paper #1 due by 11:59 p.m.

UNIT FOUR: AMERICA AND THE ROMANCE OF UTOPIA

Tuesday, September 15: *The Blithedale Romance*

Thursday, September 17: Nina Baym, "Romance" essay; Simms on Romance

Sunday, September 20: Response #2 due

Tuesday, September 22: *The Blithedale Romance*

Thursday, September 24: Melville, "Paradise of Bachelors"

Saturday, September 26: Rewrite #1 due by 11:59 p.m.

UNIT FIVE: RECONSTRUCTION AND RACIAL UTOPIA

Tuesday, September 29: *A Romance of the Republic*

Thursday, October 1: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (selections)

Sunday, October 4: Response #3

Tuesday, October 6: *A Romance of the Republic*

Thursday, October 8: Walker, *Appeal*

Saturday, October 10: Paper #2, due by 11:59 p.m.

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UNIT SIX: AFTER THE WAR (I) – UTOPIA AND BLACK NATIONALISM

Thursday, October 15: *Imperium Imperio*

Sunday, October 18: Response #4

Tuesday, October 20: assigned readings

Thursday, October 22: *Imperium Imperio*

Saturday, October 24: Rewrite #2 due by 11:59 p.m.

UNIT SEVEN: AFTER THE WAR (II) – SPECULATIVE FICTION

Tuesday, October 27: *Looking Backward*

Thursday, October 29: *Looking Backward*

Saturday, October 31: MLA Citation due by 11:59 p.m.

UNIT EIGHT: SCHOLARLY REVIEW

Tuesday, November 3: class cancelled

Thursday, November 5: More and *Looking Backward* in review

Tuesday, November 10: Behn and *Imperium in Imperio*

Thursday, November 12: Tocqueville and Walker

Tuesday, November 17: Wheatley and *Romance of the Republic*

Thursday, November 19: *American Farmer* and "Paradise of Bachelors"

Tuesday, November 24: Winthrop and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

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Tuesday, December 1: Paper workshop #1

Thursday, December 3: Paper workshop #2

Friday, December 4: Paper #3 due by 11:59 p.m.